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END OF LIFE PERSPECTIVES IN THE ENLIGHTENMENT ERA: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Abstract: This paper aims to link and compare two different conceptions of death during the Enlightenment era with contemporary bioethical concerns. Eugenios Voulgaris integrates his understanding of death into the wider philosophical and theological framework of Orthodoxy. He emphasizes a dignified acceptance of death without hastening it, viewing any attempt to artificially prolong life as a form of hubris against divine providence. Conversely, Kant's rationalist perspective categorically rejects euthanasia and suicide, viewing them as violations of the categorical imperative. Kant upholds the preservation of life as a perfect duty, emphasizing autonomy and dignity. This comparative analysis highlights the ethical and philosophical divergence between Voulgaris' theologically influenced acceptance of death and Kant's strict moral framework opposing the intentional ending of life. The study underscores

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the relevance of these Enlightenment perspectives in informing contemporary debates on euthanasia and the moral dimensions of end-of-life decisions.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Eugenios Voulgaris, Immanuel Kant, death preparation, dignity, autonomy

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the article is to link and compare two different conceptions of death during the Enlightenment era with contemporary bioethical concerns, especially euthanasia, a classical ethical issue, which in the relevant literature has also appeared as a right to death that is being asserted. Of course, if we acknowledge that we have a right to die, this implies that either another person has the duty to assist us in this claim, or not to prevent us from exercising our right. How morally correct is such assistance and, more importantly, how can such a duty be founded? The concept of death runs throughout moral philosophy and certainly other branches. The reason is that death concerns all of us, or will definitely concern us at some time during our lives as it is our only certainty. In our age, which is characterized by the glorification of autonomy and self-determination,⁴ the moral agent wishes to plan his life and therefore the moment of his death.⁵ Excluding suicide, if we assume that we have a right to die, so that the state (or the health worker) has a duty to assist us, in this case we are talking about euthanasia, which is carried out under certain conditions and in accordance with bioethical principles. The question of the end of life (euthanasia/suicide), as well as the beginning of life (abortion), has been the subject of classical philosophy. Euthanasia is considered a predominantly classical bioethical issue that has bedevilled ethical and political philosophy. Let us remember the words of Seneca: “Just as I shall select my ship when I am about to go on a voyage, or my house when I propose to take a residence, so I shall choose my death when I am about

4 For a comprehensive account of the development of this outlook, see Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, *Creating Unique Copies: Human Reproductive Cloning, Uniqueness, and Dignity* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2023), 62ff. <https://doi.org/10.30819/5698>.

5 Even have control over the quality of their offspring; see Julian Savulescu and Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, “‘Ethical Minefields’ and the Voice of Common Sense,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (2019): 125-133. <http://dx.doi.org/10.12681/cjp.19712>.

to depart from life.”⁶ The attempt of a first approach to understanding the term euthanasia made from the combination of the words “well” and “death,” is interpreted as the best possible,⁷ easiest and painless death, the induction of painless death or its haste, in order to shorten the agony of dying or suffering incurable disease. This term, of course, was first used in the sense it has today by Francis Bacon, who wrote that the physician’s responsibility to alleviate the “physical sufferings” of the body.⁸ Can euthanasia be an autonomous choice of the rational human being? Could euthanasia, as a moral choice, become a universal law?⁹ Does man, be it an expert or not, have the right to end the life of his fellow man and to provide him with an easy and peaceful end?

In the following chapters we will analyse the views on death as expressed by two representatives of the Enlightenment, Eugenios Voulgaris and Immanuel Kant. From the beginning, it will be mentioned that Eugenios Voulgaris, a central figure of the Modern Greek Enlightenment, integrates his understanding of death into the wider philosophical and theological framework of Orthodoxy, seeking a coupling between ancient and Hellenistic philosophy and Christian doctrine, while Immanuel Kant, representative of an absolute concept of rationalism, placed the concept of death under the rational nature of the individual. The overall comparison highlights the differences in how each philosopher incorporates ethics and the question of death into his philosophical work. In any case, it is emphasized that we will be dealing with a question that did not have the same importance in the Enlightenment as it does in our time. However, this is not philosophical anachronism, as

6 Seneca, *Moral Essays*, Volume II, trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 1932), 89-97

7 Still there is strong controversy on this; see Andrew Pavelich, “Is it Possible to be Better Off Dead? An Epicurean Analysis of Physician-Assisted Suicide,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 115-132. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.24400>.

8 F. Bacon, *The Major Works by Francis Bacon*, ed. Brian Vickers (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 212; On the physician’s responsibility see also J. L. Guerrero Quiñones, “Physicians’ Role in Helping to Die,” *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2022): 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.29548>.

9 For an unexpected but well-grounded rejection, see Donovan van der Haak, “Death Anxiety, Immortality Projects and Happiness: A Utilitarian Argument Against the Legalization of Euthanasia,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (2021): 159-174. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.24316>.

it is important to navigate through the thought of classical philosophers and explore their approaches.

II. EUGENIOS VOULGARIS: DISSERTATION ON EUTHANASIA

Regarding the issue of euthanasia, Eugenios Voulgaris (1716-1806), a prolific theologian, clergyman, philosopher, pioneer of the Neo-Hellenic Enlightenment and teacher of the Nation,¹⁰ attempts a different approach to euthanasia. His book deals with issues that were to concern humanity a century or two later, and is therefore considered pioneering. His argumentation is dressed in orthodox clothing to substantiate the fact of death, yet he constantly makes references that derive from ancient Greek philosophical tradition, but without strong foundations. He believed that there should be no medical involvement, even though the need to prepare for death is essential. Voulgaris proposed euthanasia as a means of reconciling man with death, the meaning of the term euthanasia being the release of the patient from his suffering and therefore containing redemptive power. It is the spiritual preparation for death, the consoling of death, the alleviation of pain and the reconciliation of man with this fact. As is well known, the human species was punished due to the disobedience of the firstborn, so that when the death of man approaches, fear increases.¹¹ Therefore, the silencing of the time of the occurrence of death has made a conflation with the certainty and inevitability of death by Divine Providence. The consequence of this is the death of the person suffering from terror before the time to depart from life has come. The fearlessness of death belongs either to God or to a beast; it is only possible to survive, that is, as a consequence of divine reinforcement, or to disappear, as a product of ignorance. He fully supports the Christian position that life is a sacred gift and rejects any voluntary termination of life. The rapid development of technologies and

10 E. A. Dimitriadi, "Eugenios Voulgaris' Thesis on Euthanasia and Death Preparation According to Christian Ethics" (PhD diss., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2021), 5 [in Greek].

11 E. Voulgaris, *Thesis On Euthanasia*, eds. John Dimoliatis and Manolis Galanakis (Athens: Exantas, 2005): 77 [in Greek]; Georgios Kranidiotis, "The Concept of Euthanasia in Eugenios Voulgaris," *Ethics – Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2019): 30 [in Greek]. <https://doi.org/10.12681/ethiki.22775>

sciences, of course, was a milestone in the advancement of medicine resulting in the cure of many diseases and therefore many people have come to believe that death can be eliminated or prolonged as much as possible. The desire for longevity makes death unbearable. Man would like never to die, but since this is impossible, he constantly desires the postponement of the inevitable.¹² In fact, he openly states that all actions or attempts that can be carried out to prolong life are unequal and abnormal both to the Creator and to the interest of man, in the sense of the existence of limits in life, with the aim of eliminating and accepting death without of course meaning the questioning and, by extension, the contempt of medical science. For Voulgaris, it is an indispensable part of life that will give man a rest, especially when he is in old age, now mature to await it with generosity and equanimity, unperturbed without protests and with discomfort about the impending death, since euthanasia itself for him is waiting in a calm manner without hastening it. It is necessary for every being in earthly life to reconcile himself with the idea of death by accepting only the so-called spiritual euthanasia, without lamenting his fate by agonizing over his coming end, being excessively afraid of facing it, but on the one hand to mitigate his fear by being modest, and on the other hand to make the persons who surround and love him moderate and impartial; it is necessary for them to help him by their conciliation in dealing with and preparing for it well.¹³ In the opposite case, of course, the ardent desire for the continuation of life with the logical consequence of the repulsion and forgetfulness of death indicates weak faith and dependence on material goods, mostly committing blasphemies / hybris against the Creator. Faith in the afterlife and in divine providence is one of the main arguments used by Voulgaris in his book, in order to alleviate death anxiety, and this is because every person who lacks faith fears the unknown, due to his uncertainty. In contrast, faith in God and in the afterlife reduces fear, because the eternity of the afterlife is condemned in contrast to the earthly life which is ephemeral. The consequence of this faith is the

12 G. Kranidiotis, 31.

13 E. A. Dimitriadi, "Eugenios Voulgaris' Thesis on Euthanasia and Death Preparation According to Christian Ethics," 14-15.

trust in God and the sober realization that death is not the end but the starting point of another life.¹⁴

Eugenios Voulgaris, however, does not view death as a concept to be repelled but as an integral part of life, and thus speaks openly about the end of human existence. For him, death is considered a unique healer that ends all of life's sufferings and provides rest to humans, rejecting any voluntary termination of life.¹⁵ He also rejects excessive efforts to prolong life through medical science, seeing such attempts as a form of hubris against the Creator. However, he neither undervalues nor dismisses medical science, but encourages the reader to understand that life has certain limits that must be accepted, along with the acceptance of death itself.¹⁶ He does not hesitate to describe attempts to terminate or extend human life¹⁷ as "unequal" and "irregular" according to the Creator's plan and humanity's best interests.

It is natural for humans to feel awe and fear towards death. However, as previously mentioned, Eugenios Voulgaris' views on fear, sorrow, and disturbance concerning death align with the beliefs of the Orthodox Christian Church. Therefore, Voulgaris does not advocate for complete fearlessness and apathy; on the contrary, he believes such an attitude is contrary to human nature. What he suggests is a measured fear and moderation¹⁸ neither "dying poorly" nor "dreading death" due to excessive fear but rather "dying well," that is, dying peacefully and accepting one's end.¹⁹ In this regard, he argues that it is the duty of humans to strengthen their soul through various means and contemplations to moderate the terror they feel towards death, but not to eliminate fear entirely, as that would be unnatural. Pious faith in God does not dictate that one should be entirely fearless or without sorrow, but rather accepts both fear and sorrow, as long as sorrow does not mask despair and distrust.

14 Ibid., 14.

15 E. Voulgaris, *Thesis On Euthanasia*, 59-63.

16 Ibid., 65.

17 Ibid., 115.

18 Rev. V. Kalliakmanis, "Euthanasia According to Eugenios Voulgaris," in *Eugenios Voulgaris: The Homo Universalis of Modern Hellenism. 300 Years Since His Death (1716-2016)*, ed. Charitos Karanasios, 557-568 (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2018): 562 [in Greek].

19 E. Voulgaris, *Thesis On Euthanasia*, 103.

A scrutinizing look at everyday reality reveals that the essence of human existence in the world is discovered through passions and the joys of life. The pleasures of life are the pillars upon which existence is built, and thus the soul begins to love the futile pleasures of the present life more. Therefore, when the time of departure approaches, a person trembles at the thought of leaving these earthly pleasures²⁰ behind.

At this point, Voulgaris asserts that a person who gradually distances themselves from passions and transient desires remains untroubled by death.²¹ He explains that for such a person, death is not the end, nor should it cause sorrow, for the Lord sent His Son to earth, who through His sacrificial death on the cross, conquered death; thus, death no longer exists.²² Furthermore, the soul never dies because it is incorruptible and immortal. In the present life, it is merely in an inseparable connection with the perishable and created body, and when the time of the end approaches, the soul understands that the body is no longer necessary to it. Consequently, it separates from the body and ascends to the heavens.²³

Additionally, Voulgaris writes in his *Treatise on Euthanasia* that “Christians should also reflect on the evils that sprout directly from the disposition of the human soul itself, those that depend on will and inclination [...]. The impending death interrupts, annuls, and ceases them [...]. For when death occurs to one who lives devoutly and justly, it snatches them from the danger of falling into various other transgressions [...].” When death approaches a person who has indulged in sins, it curbs or halts their reckless and unrestrained impulse toward evil...²⁴ Consequently, Voulgaris concludes that God acts always in the best interest of humanity, guided solely by His love and wisdom, and therefore, whatever He permits humans to endure is ultimately for their benefit.²⁵ Regarding the issue of premature death, Voulgaris develops a specific line of thought. Firstly, he analyzes the concept of “long life,” which serves as the starting point for his further contempla-

20 N. P. Vassiliadis, *The Mystery of Death* (Athens: Sotir, 1993): 222-223.

21 E. Voulgaris, *Thesis on Euthanasia*, 168.

22 A. Kalamatas, “Thesis on Euthanasia: A Small and Neglected Work of Eugenios Voulgaris,” 171.

23 E. Voulgaris, *Thesis On Euthanasia*, 130.

24 *Ibid.*, 157-158.

25 *Ibid.*, 144-146 and 158-159.

tion on premature death. He notably states that every person, whether young or old, desires to live for many years, and the thought of death, which will come sooner or later, is disheartening. Everyone would prefer “not to die now but later,” or even never. However, if we assume that “everyone born since the beginning of the world until now were still alive [...] and if the people of the current generation were together with them simultaneously, would humanity be in a better condition? How would so many people live together?”

From this reflection, Voulgaris concludes that death is necessary because each person has a life cycle. Moreover, the human species “renews” itself through death, for if everyone were immortal, chaos would prevail. Above all, it must not be overlooked that the lifespan of each person, whether longer or shorter, is determined by the exceedingly good and wise providence of the Creator and is designed for each individual’s benefit. Therefore, everyone must face death bravely, regardless of the age or stage of life at which it occurs. In addition, Voulgaris argues that a person who dies or sees death approaching at a very young age (specifically mentioning 25 years old as an example) feels a deep bitterness and sorrow, believing they are too young to die.

Nevertheless, this young person, before succumbing to sorrow, should consider that many people around the world who saw the light of day on the same date as him, did not enjoy it for more than three years, passing away at a much younger age and experiencing far fewer aspects of life. Therefore, a young person in such a situation has, in a way, been more fortunate and should be grateful to God for allowing them to live at least twenty-two years longer than those who died in their infancy.²⁶

Furthermore, it is not uncommon for God to choose to take someone from life precisely because He loves them deeply and sees that this person is full of piety and love, yet lives in a world filled with evil and sin. In these cases, God decides to take them early to ensure they are not influenced by their surroundings and to preserve their pure soul. This person was pleasing to the Lord, which is why He took them quickly from a sinful world,²⁷ either to save them or to spare them from the suffering caused by the corruption around them.²⁸

26 Ibid., 114-117.

27 Ibid., 156-157.

28 Ibid., 46.

Finally, the concept of euthanasia in Eugenios Voulgaris is in no way related to the modern concept of euthanasia – as the active hastening of death, with medical intervention, of a patient suffering from an incurable and painful disease. As already evident from the full title of the Dissertation, as well as from the question to which it is asked to answer, Voulgaris perceives euthanasia as the suffering of death after bravery and cheerfulness, as endurance around death.

III. REASON AND AUTONOMY: KANT'S MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND THE DEFENSE OF DIGNITY

Kant's moral philosophy promotes the idea that moral action is founded on the compliance of universal, logical (non-contradictory) principles, on the autonomy and dignity of the rational moral agent. Kant believes in reason in human understanding, and this is reflected throughout his work. Kant celebrates the rational nature; he believes that man possesses reason to be able to construct moral principles which become universalizable precisely because of the freedom that distinguishes him. By this, he means that man is a free being who is not heteronomous, that is, not influenced by the circumstances and conditions of the moment, is autonomous and, because of the reason that distinguishes him, can and does act in accordance with the universal law which he himself makes. For Kant we are all lawmakers; we create laws, rules so that we can act independently of our desires, passions and interests.

Specifically, Immanuel Kant presents the basic elements of his moral system in his work *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785). He considers that the purpose of rationality is to create a good will not because of its results, a will not as a means for other purposes, but one in itself which is not influenced by sensual or aesthetic impulses and instincts, that is, by empirical causes and motives, but sets a priori moral values and its main characteristic is freedom, which is identified with autonomy, that is with the quality of the will to set the law upon itself and is the foundation of dignity and the basis of morality. It becomes obvious at this point that euthanasia would call into question this quality of the will, therefore, it would degrade the dignity of the moral person and destroy the foundation of morality. And this, because man tries to escape from a difficult position he has fallen into

using his face only as a means to maintain a tolerable state until the end of his life.²⁹ However, according to Kant, man is not an irrational being and therefore a thing, which is used only as a means, but must, in all his actions, always be considered as an end in itself: “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.”³⁰ Human existence as a subject of morality is an end in itself, while by exterminating it it uses it only as a means. He who seeks to be killed to get rid of unbearable pain, does not perceive himself as an end in itself but instead plans to use the destruction of his existence as a means to achieve another goal, namely his redemption from pain. The subjective foundation of the desire to cause death is the motive, the possibility of the intentional act, the means to achieve the goal, while the objective foundation of the will is the kinetic cause, it is the purpose given through logic and it is valid for any rational being. Thus, the true and invaluable value of a good will is that the moral axiom does not depend on the influence of some random cause and that logic must be considered as the creator of its axioms regardless of external influences and therefore as practical logic or as a will must be considered in itself as free, a freedom that is identified with autonomy. With this argument, the man with assisted suicide cannot put humanity in his face, let it wear him down or cause his death. For him it is considered a crime and an insult to the duty of the rational being to himself and this choice could never become a universal law of nature. However, the universality of law constitutes what is called nature with the most general meaning (in relation to form), that is, it constitutes the existence of things insofar as this existence is determined by universal laws, according to Kant “Act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”³¹ He writes:

“Someone feels sick of life because of a series of troubles that has grown to the point of despair, but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether it would not be contrary to his duty to himself to take his own life. Now he inquires whether the maxim of his action could indeed become a universal law of nature. His maxim,

29 Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 4: 396.

30 *Ibid.*, 4: 429.

31 *Ibid.*, 4: 421.

however, is: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when its longer duration threatens more troubles than it promises agreeableness. The only further question is whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. It is then seen at once that a nature whose law it would be to destroy life itself by means of the same feeling whose destination is to impel toward the furtherance of life would contradict itself and would therefore not subsist as nature; thus that maxim could not possibly be a law of nature and, accordingly, altogether opposes the supreme principle of all duty."³²

Of course, Kant makes no reference to euthanasia. He pondered and dealt with the issue of suicide, considering that the first duty to ourselves, is the duty that forbids suicide, for the simple reason that, considered an act in itself, it may be completely free, but it is an act that destroys the further existence of the individual and hence, his potential for future freedom. Since euthanasia shares with suicide the rational being's decision to end his life, it seems reasonable that what he advocates for suicide could be applied by analogy in the case of euthanasia. And reality testifies that Kant, considering that suicide is against a perfect duty of the rational being, criticizes it and is diametrically opposed to it; therefore, as a choice, it could never become a universal law of nature, as we have already mentioned. Of course, at this point one might express the thought that in a patient suffering from a chronic, painful and irreversible disease, and the continuation of life reserves more misery than pleasure, euthanasia seems to be the elixir in the most painless form of death. This is because the patient, trapped by the surrounding atmosphere, influenced by external motives, in a body that can hold unpleasant and painful surprises, is literally frightened, is not in a cool emotional state, is trapped in his impulses, suffers, the decision of assisted suicide seems logical.

IV. KANT'S CASUISTICAL QUESTIONS

Kant, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, formulates a rigorous moral system based on the categorical imperative and discusses various moral obligations, including duties to oneself in relation to the preservation of human life. According to Kantian ethics, suicide is contrary to the

32 Ibid., 4: 422.

moral law because it violates the categorical imperative which requires that we treat the moral person, including ourselves, as an end and not just a means. For Kant, human life has absolute value and may not be sacrificed for any purpose, even to avoid suffering or humiliation; specifically, in the chapter “Duties to Oneself as an Animal Being,” he emphasizes that suicide is always unacceptable and immoral. However, in this chapter he discusses various cases and scenarios, which I call case studies³³ where suicide may seem legitimate for humans, though ultimately, he rejects its moral acceptability in all cases. However, it is interesting to mention these cases:

“Can a great king who died recently be charged with a criminal intention for carrying a fast-acting poison with him, presumably so that if he were captured when he led his troops into battle he could not be coerced to agree to conditions of ransom harmful to his state? For one can ascribe this purpose to him without having to presume that mere pride lay behind it.”³⁴

In this passage, Kant wonders whether the act of suicide can be justified, not as a selfish escape, but as a greater responsibility and duty to our fellow human beings. Therefore, in the example of the King who commits suicide by poison so as to avoid being captured by enemies and endangering his own state, Kant raises the parameter of the *intention* of this act, which may indicate that perhaps suicide is not morally reprehensible. Kantian reasoning is not concerned with cases in which the moral person wishes to end his life with only the preservation of his dignity as the regulating principle of his will. So, if the King chose suicide only to avoid disgrace, then it is absolutely certain that this is a morally unacceptable act.

Another example that falls into these grey areas is that of a man who has been bitten by a rabid animal and chooses to commit suicide to avoid harming others. Even in this case, of course, Kant wonders, “did he do wrong?” and chooses not to file a definitive answer:

33 On case studies and borderline situations, see M. Chorianopoulou, *From Practical Philosophy to Medical Ethics: Essays on Human Rights and Borderline Situations* (Madrid: Ediciones del Orto, 2021).

34 I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 6: 623.

“Is it murdering oneself to hurl oneself to certain death (like Curtius) in order to save one’s country? - or is deliberate martyrdom, sacrificing one-self for the good of all humanity, also to be considered an act of heroism? Is it permitted to anticipate by killing oneself the unjust death sentence of one’s ruler — even if the ruler permits this (as did Nero with Seneca) Can a great king who died recently be charged with a criminal intention for carrying a fast-acting poison with him, presumably so that if he were captured when he led his troops into battle he could not be forced to agree to conditions of ransom harmful to his state? – for one can ascribe this purpose to him without having to presume that mere pride lay behind it. A man who had been bitten by a mad dog already felt hydrophobia coming on. He explained, in a letter he left, that, since as far as he knew the disease was incurable, he was taking his life lest he harm others as well in his madness (the onset of which he already felt). Did he do wrong?”³⁵

According to Kant, the above constitute casuistic questions (casuistische Frage), which remain unanswered, but seem to have been of particular concern to him throughout his writing, because in an earlier work entitled *Lectures on Ethics* (1775-1780) we read:

“We must await our death with resolution. There is little worth in that which there is great worth in treating with disdain. On the other hand, however, we ought not to risk our life, and hazard it from mere interest or private aims, for in that case we are not only acting imprudently, but also ignobly, e.g., if we wanted to wager a considerable sum on swimming across a lake. There is no good in the world for which we are liable, as a matter of duty rather than freedom, to put our life at risk.”³⁶

Kant believes that while we should face death with courage, we should never risk our lives for meaningless or selfish purposes. He gives the example of betting on swimming at the risk of drowning. In Kantian moral theory such an act is reckless and dishonest in the sense that it is not appropriate for rational beings. Further on, however, in the same passage he mentions cases in which we can – and ought to – as rational beings, take the responsibility to protect life since we have a duty to the general good (he would later call it *good will* in his *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, 1785), such as war, in which

35 Ibid., 6: 423-424.

36 I. Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Peter Heat, eds. Peter Heath and J. B. Schneewind (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 27: 376-377.

soldiers sacrifice their lives, not to achieve personal goals, but because they are obliged to do so by their own duty to others.

There are, indeed, circumstances in which a man risks his life from interest, e.g., as a soldier in war. But that is not a private aim, but for the general benefit. Because men are already so constituted that they wage wars, there are also those who devote themselves to soldiering. It is a very subtle question, how far we ought to treasure our life, and how far to risk it.”

“The main point is this: Humanity, in our person, is an object of the highest respect and never to be violated in us. In the cases where a man is liable to dishonour, he is duty bound to give up his life, rather than dishonour the humanity in his own person. For does he do honour to it, if it is to be dishonoured by others? If a man can preserve his life no otherwise than by dishonouring his humanity, he ought rather to sacrifice it. He then, indeed, puts his animal life in danger, yet he feels that, so long as he has lived, he has lived honourably. It matters not that a man lives long (for it is not his life that he loses by the event, but only the prolongation of the years of his life, since nature has already decreed that he will someday die); what matters is, that so long as he lives, he should live honourably, and not dishonour the dignity of humanity. If he can now no longer live in that fashion, he cannot live at all; his moral life is then at an end. But moral life is at an end if it no longer accords with the dignity of humanity. This moral life is determined through its evil and hardships. Amid all torments, I can still live morally, and must endure them all, even death itself, before ever I perform a disreputable act. At the moment when I can no longer live with honour, and become by such an action unworthy of life, I cannot live at all. It is therefore far better to die with honour and reputation, than to prolong one’s life by a few years through a discreditable action. If somebody, for example, can preserve life no longer save by surrendering their person to the will of another, they are bound rather to sacrifice their life, than to dishonour the dignity of humanity in their person, which is what they do by giving themselves up as a thing to the will of someone else.”³⁷

Throughout his moral philosophy Kant glorifies human reason, especially in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* in which he constructs and grounds his moral system in the rational nature that all human beings possess without exception. But again, in *The Meta-*

37 I. Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 27: 377.

physics of Morals he has mentioned some instances where men reduce themselves to an animal state and become slaves to their lust. These cases concern pleasures and passions of all kinds, such as overeating out of gluttony, drinking and drugs. Indeed, he considers that excessive eating is more debasing to man than drink and drugs because not only does it deprive him of the ability to think rationally, but, unlike drink and drugs of all kinds, it does not even provide him with some moments of temporary apparent euphoria. He is so strict as to declare that when the moral person falls into such situations, he violates a duty to himself, acts illiberally, that is, like an animal, and should not even be treated as a human being by society since he has been stripped of his dignity.

“British excess in the use of food and drink is misuse of the means of nourishment that restricts or exhausts our capacity to use them intelligently. *Drunkenness* and *gluttony* are the vices that come under this heading. A human being who is drunk is like a mere animal, not to be treated as a human being. When stuffed with food he is in a condition in which he is incapacitated, for a time, for actions that would require him to use his powers with skill and deliberation. – It is obvious that putting oneself in such a state violates a duty to oneself. The first of these debasements, below even the nature of an animal, is usually brought about by fermented drinks, but it can also result from other narcotics, such as opium and other vegetable products. They are seductive because, under their influence, people dream for a while that they are happy and free from care, and even imagine that they are strong; but dejection and weakness follow and, worst of all, they create a need to use the narcotics again and even to increase the amount. Gluttony is even lower than that animal enjoyment of the senses, since it only lulls the senses into a passive condition and, unlike drunkenness, does not even arouse imagination to an *active* play of representations; so it approaches even more closely the enjoyment of cattle.”³⁸

Does choosing death agree with what Kant stands for? Certainly not, since it is demoralising for the moral agent by depriving them of their dignity.³⁹ In the eyes of Kant dignity equals autonomy, and the

38 I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, 6: 427.

39 In Kant’s view, dignity distinguishes humans from the rest of the creation – it is the crest of any value; for a deflationary account of human dignity as just one among other values of equal significance see Filimon Peonidis, “Making Sense of Dignity: A Starting Point,” *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.23604>.

decision for either suicide or euthanasia couldn't qualify as an autonomous one, since it contradicts reason, therefore it cannot be taken by a rational moral agent: either because it violates the second formulation of the categorical imperative, or because it contradicts the inherent purpose of the will, that is, to will: the will that wills to cease willing can only be in contradiction to itself. In a nutshell, the will of the one who seeks euthanasia is guided by the ultimate goal of its abolition. Even if euthanasia is interpreted as a cry of unbearable pain, of relentless physical torture, the patient may not act as a rational being; his request may be guided by the paralytic effect of pain on his rationality.⁴⁰ In this case, it is likely that what the patient is seeking is not death, but to satisfy another set of needs, such as integrating the doctors' efforts to alleviate the pain. So euthanasia – at least in the context of the Kantian approach – seems to falsify the autonomy of the moral person, thus catalyzing his morality, a fact that severely affects his dignity, all for two reasons: On the one hand, in this context, the moral agent ceases to be an end in itself and degrades to a simple means, and on the other hand, it is inherently contradictory as a moral choice; therefore, it could not become a universal law. Therefore, man, expert or not, has no right to plot the life of his fellow man and cause or hasten premature death. Let us remember the words of Seneca: there is no need to stress more than the warning that we should not take, like the sheep, the line of the herd that precedes, thus travelling on the road that everyone walks, but on the road that we must walk. To conclude, on the one hand, the thoughts of resignation, voluntary and passive departure from life, escape, and escape from pain; on the other hand, the thoughts of struggle, battle, and struggle for life – all contribute according to the Kantian formula to the cornerstone, which in the case of euthanasia is autonomy and with it the universal axiom of morality, which is the basis of all rational beings, just as natural law is the basis of all phenomena.

40 See L. Tsiakiri, "Euthanasia: Promoter of Autonomy or Supporter of Bio-power?" *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2022): 123-133. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.25088>

V. CONCLUSION

This essay delves into the views of Eugenios Voulgaris and Immanuel Kant on self-inflicted death, that is, suicide back in their days, and by extension euthanasia as assisted suicide today. We tried to highlight the differences and similarities in their approaches in detail, often by quoting representative passages from their works. Eugenios Voulgaris adopts a train of thought that mainly focuses on human dignity and the moral dimension of end-of-life decisions while incorporating the principles of the Orthodox Christian view. In contrast, Kant, through the prism of a rigid moral theory, by and large, rejects suicide – and, by analogy, euthanasia, as contrary to the moral law. Voulgaris sees death as an inevitable, necessary part of human existence; probably echoing the Epicurean teaching, he suggests spiritual preparation and reconciliation with the idea of death. Kant, on the other hand, focuses on the autonomy of the moral agent and the perfect self-regarding duty to preserve life, even in conditions of unbearable suffering; to him self-inflicted death is no option since it can only be a violation of the first as well as the second formula of the categorical imperative, turning humanity into a mere means to the end of avoiding pain or any other untoward circumstances.⁴¹ The comparative analysis of these two thinkers, Voulgaris and Kant, examined two diverse – but often divergent – philosophical approaches to self-inflicted death, aspiring to offer insight into the emergence of today’s heated debate on the possibility of ‘autonomous’ or rational euthanasia and the extent to which opting for it would either compromise or safeguard the dignity of the moral agent.

41 That said, the casuistical questions in the *Metaphysics of Morals* leave room for often unexpected interpretations by Kantian ethicists; for a view suggesting that euthanasia – a fortiori, active euthanasia – could be seen as an others-regarding imperfect duty of solidarity, see Evangelos D. Protopapadakis, “Why Letting Die Instead of Killing? Choosing Active Euthanasia on Moral Grounds,” *Proceedings of the XXIII World Congress of Philosophy* 3 (2018): 85-90. <https://doi.org/10.5840/wcp232018394>.

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POGLEDI NA OKONČANJE ŽIVOTA U DOBU PROSVETITELJSTVA: KOMPARATIVNI PRISTUP

Sažetak: Rad ima za cilj da poveže i uporedi dva različita shvatanja smrti iz doba prosvetiteljstva sa savremenim bioetičkim problematizacijama. Evgenije Vulgaris integriše svoje shvatanje smrti u širi filozofski i teološki okvir pravoslavlja. On naglasak stavlja na dostojanstveno prihvatanje smrti, pri čemu ona ne bi bila požurivana, dok svaki pokušaj da se život produži veštačkim putem shvata kao oblik obesti spram božjeg providenja. Nasuprot tome, Kantova racionalistička perspektiva kategorički odbacuje eutanaziju i samoubištvo, shvatajući ih kao kršenje kategoričkog imperativa. Kant održanje života smatra savršenom dužnošću, naglašavajući autonomiju i dostojanstvo. Ova uporedna analiza osvetljava etičke i filozofske različitosti između Vulgarisovog teološki konotiranog prihvatanja smrti i Kantovog strogo moralnog okvira koji se suprotstavlja namernom okončanju života. Studija ističe važnost i informativnost ovih prosvetiteljskih gledišta za savremene debate o eutanaziji i moralnoj dimenziji odluka vezanih za okončanje života.

Ključne reči: prosvetiteljstvo, Evgenije Vulgaris, Imanuel Kant, priprema za smrt, dostojanstvo, autonomija

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